

Angels on Stage





★ Perception, Not Perfection

by Amy Parham

The excitement at the rehearsal studio each Saturday morning is palpable. As each of the actors and actresses enter the room, they high-five their friends, talk about what songs will be practiced that day, and begin to work out kinks for the newly choreographed dance moves. Performances are several months away, but already auditions are taking place, scenes are being blocked and lines are being learned. It's a vibrant space, filled with people joyous about music and laughter and being together.

For the fourth year running, Angels on Stage is starting its theatre season with all the excitement of children's theatre troupes around the country. But Angels on Stage (AoS), a San Jose, California based non-profit organization,

is not like other theatre troupes: in all AoS productions and rehearsals, the actors are children with a wide range of differing abilities aged 5-22.

Founded in 2008 by DeAnna Pursai, in honor of her sister Angel who happens to have Down syndrome, AoS is modeled after a theatre program in Indiana they participated in together. Angels on Stage produces an annual, professional theatrical production that illuminates the abilities of 100 actors and actresses with special needs, or Angels. Past productions include The Wizard of Oz, The Jungle Book, Aladdin and, this year, Alice in Wonderland.

The guiding principle of AoS is "Perception, Not Perfection." In order to achieve that goal, and using theatre as a medium to illuminate the abilities of the Angels, AoS fosters teamwork and collaboration among participants, parents, donors, staff and volunteers. A safe, inclusive environment for everyone involved in the organization, at every level, is of the utmost importance, as is respect for all individuals and the encouragement of ongoing creativity.





Due to the varied needs of the Angels, the dedicated staff of AoS ranges from theatre professionals to adaptation/special education consultants. Additionally, a key component of Angels on Stage is the volunteer Buddy Coach program. Angels are matched 1:1 or in small groups with their peers, some typically developing, others with differing abilities themselves. Buddy coaches provide modeling of appropriate behaviors, assist with anything production related and serve as mentors to the Angels. Some Angels require special accommodations to perform due to ambulatory, sensory or behavioral challenges. The AoS staff creates modifications and adaptations every step of the way to ensure Angels are able to reach the best of their ability.

For many Angels and families involved in AoS, the benefits of participation go well beyond a theatrical performance. Newly found confidence and self-esteem, enriched language and articulation skills, improved behavior, expression and movement are all positively impacted for the Angels. Additionally, AoS provides a social experience for many children and fosters an all-inclusive program both within Angels on Stage and throughout the greater community.

As one parent, Jeanne Griffith, states: "It's amazing, inspiring and life-changing. There aren't enough words to describe all that is Angels on Stage. Every week these Angels leave us in awe of their abilities, their passion, their creativity and love. The way Angels on Stage empowers our children is simply awesome."

As this fourth season begins, Angels on Stage is exploring new ways for continued growth, to serve more Angels, and ultimately to have a presence throughout the country. And every Saturday morning, from now until March, the Angels are rehearsing, laughing, dancing and singing, and inspiring all who encounter the magic that is Angels on Stage.

For more information on Angels on Stage, visit www.angelsonstage.org. ♥



**BRAVO,
applause
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ANGELS ON STAGE

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